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ABSTRACT

The working paper for a project on English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) education examines research and policy as they relate to the ability of adult students to access ESL programs, fully participate in and benefit from them, and make the transition to other "mainstream" academic programs or meaningful employment. Studies suggest that adult education in the United States has failed to meet the needs of immigrants and other language minorities, and the paper identifies specific areas of concern in promoting access, participation, and transition. It then reviews literature on effective program models and practices and identifies several promising programs across the nation. It concludes with recommendations for effective interagency program models and national policy considerations. (Contains 61 references.) (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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# ACCESS, PARTICIPATION, AND TRANSITION IN ADULT ESL: Implications for Policy and Practice

by

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# ACCESS, PARTICIPATION, AND TRANSITION IN ADULT ESL: Implications for Policy and Practice

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## OVERVIEW

Adult "illiteracy"[1] and lack of English language proficiency are often characterized as "personal miseries" with "public consequences" that can only be abrogated through the intervention of language and literacy programs (Brodkey, 1991). In the United States, where the majority speak English and are literate in it, and where free public schooling has been available for nearly a century, the presence of large numbers of people who cannot speak, read, or write the language is the subject of considerable concern. Since English language and literacy skills are held to be essential for full participation in this country's economic and social institutions, the persistence of adult illiteracy and low levels of English language skills among a substantial portion of our adult population is a subject of considerable concern to us all. These skills are of importance to those who are locked out of full participation in the society in which they live and work. They are also of concern to educators because English language and literacy skills are usually acquired through formal instruction (Macías, 1986). Without them, millions--possibly 20 to 30 million (Chisman, 1989)--are denied access to continued educational achievement and to "better" jobs, economic mobility, and full societal participation (Vargas, 1986, Macías, 1986).

This paper addresses these concerns as they relate to (1) the ability of students to access adult ESL programs, (2) to fully participate in them and to benefit from them, and (3) to transition to other "mainstream" academic programs or to meaningful employment. The contention here is that historical and contemporary adult education in the United States has fallen short of meeting the needs of its immigrants and of other

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[1] Although the term "illiteracy" is widely used, it is problematic since it has a negative connotation. It carries a stigma that implies lack of education, and thereby, a corresponding lack of culture (Erickson, 1984). It ascribes a lower social status. Applied to adult speakers of languages other than English, it usually means the lack of English literacy (Wiley, 1992).

language minorities.[2] It identifies areas of specific concern in promoting access, participation, and transition. Then, it reviews literature on effective program models and practices and identifies several promising programs across the nation. The paper concludes with recommendations for effective interagency program models and national policy considerations.

## Historical Background: When the System Fails, Blame the Victim

Throughout much of this century, at least since the World War I era, adult education has served as the major vehicle for promoting cultural and linguistic assimilation. Blue ribbon commissions have been formed, beginning with the Dillingham Commission in 1907, to establish the negative impact of large numbers of non-English speaking peoples on the country. Given the recent economic downturn, immigrants who do not speak the majority language well, or at all, are again an easy target on which to lay blame not only in the United States, but also in Europe and Japan. Unlike many other countries, the United States has facilitated intergenerational mobility for many--though not all--of its immigrants. Historically, the promise of mobility has been linked to education.

The growth of adult education in this century has been inextricably tied to immigrant education (Cook, 1977). Unfortunately, this legacy is rarely acknowledged in discussions regarding adult education, but to overlook this connection is to miss a major formative influence in the development of adult education as institution in this country. Early in this century, English as a second language programs developed along with *Americanization* efforts designed by nativists who saw education as a means of remedying the societal ills of linguistic diversity and illiteracy. Then, as now, it was assumed that the immigrants' "illiteracy" (that is, their lack of English literacy) and lack of English cause unemployment and criminal behavior. By reviewing the popular literature of the period, it is evident that schools were seen as instruments for Anglification with a decidedly Protestant flavor (see Apple & Apple, 1982). During, and immediately following, World War I, English Only policies in the schools were imposed in most states and U.S. territories. In areas where languages other than English were prevalent-- especially in the case of German--their use was seen as an indication of disloyalty (see Leibowitz,

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[2] The expressions "minority" and "language minority" are less than ideal because they may refer to either a numerical minority or to speakers of a less dominant, but numerically larger language in many localities in the country. Recently, some have suggested dropping the term "minority" because it seems to ascribe a lower status to the people to which it refers. Unfortunately, The expression "non-dominant" is probably no less ascriptive.

1971; Luebke, 1980). The attack on German and other languages anticipated similar attacks on the Spanish language and Latino cultures in the U.S. today (see Crawford, 1992). Then, as now, "linguicism"[3] functioned in combination with racism and other forms of ethnic and religious prejudice. Contrary to one of the more popular myths today, the cultural and linguistic absorption of the more "meltable" European groups ordinarily took several generations (see Weiss, 1982, and Wiley, 1993).

By the 1920s most states and local governments had Americanization laws. Across the nation, school districts responded by creating civics and English classes for the foreign-born; businesses and labor unions organized similar classes (McClymer, 1982). Nevertheless, despite their ambitions, Americanizers failed to fully assimilate adult Eastern and Southern European immigrants for two reasons: (1) sufficient resources were not allocated to immigrant adult education efforts, and (2) the goal of "total" Americanization was too extreme because it caused many to drop out of the program (McClymer, 1982). According to Montalto (1982) a significant unintended outcome of the program was that it weakened the status of the ancestral language and culture in the eyes the unassimilated second generation leaving many sociologists of the time to conclude that inter-generational cultural conflicts were one of the primary causes of juvenile delinquency (see also Wiley, 1993).

Little attention was paid to the contributions of immigrants in transforming the United States into a major industrial power. Americanizers never thought to assess the broader social and cultural situation of their target populations. Rather, they sought to make non-English speaking immigrants more "tolerable" through adult English literacy education. They assumed that immigrants would happily surrender their first language and culture as payment for their admission to the U.S. and assumed that the immigrants' native languages and cultures could easily be exchanged for promise of acceptability and social mobility. Contrary to their expectations, the transition was largely intergenerational. It took a long time to acquire English, and the second generation was more likely to benefit from education after their parents had secured some economic stability. Nevertheless, success in "mainstream" society continues to be attributed to utilizing educational opportunity as Collins (1991) explains:

[3] Linguicism is defined as "'the ideologies and structures which are used to legitimate, effectuate and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources ... between groups on the basis of language' " (Phillipson, 1988:339).

> The idea of mobility hinges on the belief that there is equal opportunity in education and through education, opportunity for social mobility and a more equitable society. . . . *[T]he idea of mobility through literacy and education remains persuasive, despite . . . the historical experience of most people.* . . . By defining the relevant measures of social position narrowly enough, social mobility seems to work: We succeed through our 'own' efforts, as represented by the match of education and job. [Collins, 1991:234-235; emphasis added]

Recently, however, there is a danger that the possibility of mobility, even for one's children, may be waning for a growing underclass that is disproportionately populated by immigrants and other language minorities. Intergenerational mobility also appears to be slowing (Galbraith, 1992). Given the increased importance attached to speaking English and being educated today, as opposed to sixty or seventy years ago, the burden now shifts to the educational system to prove that it promotes access and participation.

Today, ESL policy and program goals directed at immigrants and refugees continue to be framed from the expectations of the receiving society. Immigrants, refugees, and indigenous groups are recruited into ESL programs either from a vague sense that learning some English will do them some good, or by the more lofty, traditional beliefs that learning English will lead to better acceptance, higher social status, and/or job mobility. Most educational research studies limit their analyses to a focus on the attitudes of individuals toward English or toward the host (or dominant) society. Others are limited to a focus on language and on the ability of individuals within target groups to acquire English language skills (Tollefson, 1991). Such studies (e.g., Taylor, 1987) often fail to consider how other factors in the life situation of potential students affect their educational success in various programs. Most studies ignore the treatment of the host U.S. society toward the target student groups. When adult ESL programs are evaluated, there is usually a concern with formal compliance rather than for meeting the needs of students as they would define them.

Since the end of the 1970s, the majority of Adult Basic Education (ABE) students have been enrolled in English as a second language (ESL) courses. Hunter and Harman (1985) have observed: "Hispanic groups, especially Hispanic women, have a noticeably lower level of educational attainment than either whites or blacks. All of those for whom English is not the mother tongue--about 30 million--face special educational difficulties" (1985:43). By the mid 1980s another national estimate of literacy placed the non-literate adult population (over the age of twenty)

at between 17 and 21 million.[4] Many of those among this group were members of minority and language minority groups. Among adult Latinos, for example, 22%, compared to 13% for the national population as a whole, were estimated to be illiterate.[5] Under-educational achievement (Kirsch & Jungeblut, 1986) and non-English language background (Ortiz, 1987) are frequently identified as factors which are most frequently associated with low levels of English speaking, reading, and writing abilities.

These figures are particularly striking when we consider that some groups, Latinos for example, represented a smaller percentage of the population. This picture has not changed much in recent years. The 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) assesses literacy in three domains: Prose literacy; document literacy; and quantitative literacy. In the most recent NALS survey: "The average prose literacy of White adults is ... higher than that of any of the other nine racial/ethnic groups [which are also for the most part language minority groups as well] reported... Similar patterns are evident on the document and quantitative scales" (Kirsch, Jungblut, Jenkins, & Kolstad, September 1993:32).

Despite the efforts of various educational programs in adult schools, community colleges and community based organizations to promote English and literacy, how do we explain the persistent lag in literacy and in educational achievement among language minority groups especially since ESL programs have been available? In the absence of explanation, a typical response is to *blame someone*, i.e., either those who fail or the educational *system*--a system that is sometimes portrayed as if it were mechanistic, mindless, or lacking in human agency. Frequently, members of language minority groups are blamed. The rationale for their failure proceeds as follows: Since ESL programs have been available, the failure to acquire English and literacy must be the result of the personal failure of students who just cannot, or will not, cut it. Again, the other option is to blame the system, i.e., the schools must not be doing their job. Within the calculus of blame--given these two options--the student has been the more likely target: "If the problem is educational failure, we do little except...to blame such failure on the backgrounds of those who fail; we certainly do not attempt extensive reform of those school systems which often appear inadequate" (Lewis, 1978:193).

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[4] Estimates are based on the English Language Proficiency Survey (ELPS), U.S. Dept. of Education, (1986).

[5] "Illiteracy" here refers only to illiteracy in English (see Wiley, 1991).

## Supply and Demand: How Available are Classes?

Many studies have indicated the lack of consistent and coordinated delivery of educational services to the ESL adult population (Cepeda, *et al.*, 1992). Here, two questions emerge: Is the supply of programs sufficient? Are the available programs appropriate?

SUPPLY. There is a growing population of students requiring and demanding English a second language (ESL) and literacy instruction. If we only look at the number of agencies offering adult ESL services, the number of programs is impressive. In California, for example, 95 of the 107 community colleges offer "non-credit" instruction (much of which is ESL). High schools, adult schools, and community colleges, together, serve approximately 2 million students each year. In 1991-92, the California community colleges alone enrolled nearly 230,000 students in non-credit courses (Cepeda, *et al.*, 1992). Community-based organizations (CBO's) and volunteer groups, e.g., Laubach, also reach some immigrants and refugees, but there are no firm statistics of the number reached by these and other volunteer programs, nor is there any firm data on their programmatic effectiveness. Thus, it is difficult to determine whether the supply of classes is sufficient because most programs are run on a space available basis and because they frequently do no maintain waiting lists.

DEMAND. Despite the range of providers and the extent of the offerings, it is evident that the demand far exceeds the supply. Most surveys of immigrant and refugee populations indicate that there is a strong motivation among these populations to learn English. Many programs are set up on a first-come, first-serve basis. Some programs maintain waiting lists, but others do not. Most programs do not recruit; they admit on a word-of-mouth basis only. Amidst recent public debates over official English and ballot initiatives that promote English as a official language, we would expect there to be an ample supply of adult ESL classes. However, in Los Angeles California, for example, on the day Proposition 63 passed, which declared English to be the "official" language of the state, there were over 40,000 students on waiting lists for ESL (Crawford, 1992).

BEYOND THE NOTIONS OF SUPPLY AND DEMAND. If we frame access issues only in terms of *demand* and *supply*, we may miss a substantial portion of the population in need of services. The notion of demand assumes that there are "informed consumers" who can articulate their desire or need for a service. Some studies, e.g., Miller (1991) indicate that there are under-severed populations who are linguistically, culturally, and/or geographically isolated or discriminated against, who cannot articulate

their needs. Without knowledge of options and voice, students, and potential students, cannot exercise choice!

## Who Are the Students in Need of Adult ESL?

Given the diversity within the adult immigrant, refugee, and indigenous language minority populations to be served, it is essential for policy makers and educators to know more about who our students and potential students are. Apart from amorphous ethnic and linguistic labeling (for example, Hispanic; Spanish-speaking; NEP; LEP; etc.), there are many ways in which groups can be identified. For example, students may be classified a variety of characteristics, including language background, language proficiency level, prior educational attainment, learning style, prior educational experience, social class, immigrant/refugee status, race, religion, ethnicity, national origin, age, and gender. Although some programs do attempt to identify some of these characteristics, many do not.

A major source of the adult ESL and literacy education pool comes from the ranks of the former K-12 (public school-age) population. It is difficult to estimate the size of that population, and it is troublesome to project how many will need adult ESL education services given the lack of reliable data from the schools--specifically as these data are related to immigrant populations. As McDonnell and Hill (1993) observe: "The limited visibility of immigrant students is evidenced in the lack of precise estimates of their numbers" (p. 2).

Unfortunately, most of the available data on the immigrant population comes from the U.S. Census rather than from school data. Based upon an analysis of Census data, a RAND Corporation study indicated that five states (California, New York, Texas, Florida, and Illinois) account for 70% of the school-age immigrant population (p. 3). California leads the nation with 41% of all the U.S. immigrant youth population followed by New York with 12%. In California more than one-in-ten students are immigrants. Los Angeles (21%), San Francisco (19%), and Dade County (Miami) (18%) have the highest community percentages of immigrant youth (McDonnell & Hill, 1993:3).

A major area overlooked, at both the level of national policy and at the level of program practice, concerns the students' prior education histories (McDonnell & Hill, 1993, Stewart, 1993). In order to determine appropriate program design and placement practices, we need to know more than merely how long students have studied English or how much English they have acquired based upon some standardized assessment. Native language literacy and prior schooling are also of major importance because a substantial portion of the potential student population has not had sufficient educational opportunity for schooling in their countries of origin, or they have dropped out or failed to complete a K-12 education.

For example, among the Mexican-born, a very large number fall into the category of "late entry" immigrants.

Note the on the following page, as the chart indicates, the majority of Mexican-born immigrants entered the country after the age of compulsory attendance (age 16). Even students who immigrate at younger ages, however, may not be able to complete their education. Many students from Mexico, Central American countries, Haiti, and elsewhere, enter with little formal instruction in English. Many, who never completed elementary school, are placed in high schools or middle schools because of their age. They lack both English and literacy in their native languages. If such students enter high school at, for example, age 15, rarely will they graduate. Their lack of English prohibits them from taking required classes for graduation. Frequently, most of their high school careers are spent learning English.

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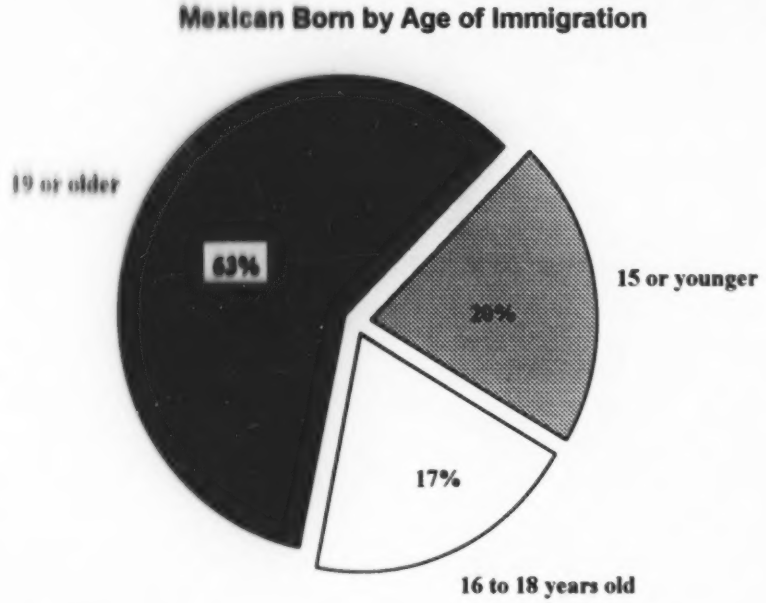


Adapted from Wiley (1988)

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Bilingual programs can help such students develop literacy in their native language while they learn English, but the supply of bilingual programs at the high school and middle school level is woefully inadequate. Even when such programs are available, these students are

involved in a race against time. Ultimately, many will not complete high school in this country. Add to this the number of students who entered the United States after high school age and the picture on the opposite page begins to emerge.

For immigrant language minorities who have not completed high school, adult ESL and ABE programs provide the only opportunity for further educational advancement. Demographic trends such as these need to be considered in the formation of national policies for adult education and by programs that serve large numbers of students from a particular country of origin. Similar comparisons should also be made for indigenous language minority groups.

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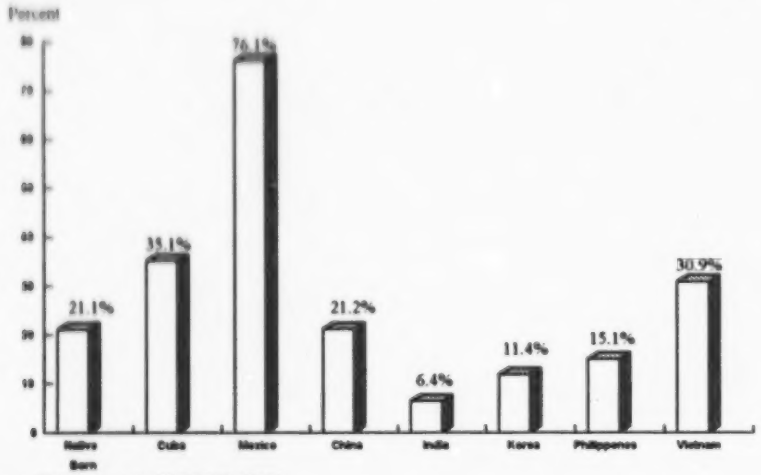
LESS THAN HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION
BY NATIONAL ORIGIN




Adapted from Stewart (1993:23)

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> The localized impact of immigration means that the federal government has little incentive to address the unique needs of newcomers. On the other hand, the aspects of those students' schooling requirements most likely to gain widespread attention--their need to learn English--is so intertwined with fundamental cultural and political beliefs that it is rarely addressed as solely an educational issue. [McDonnell & Hill, 1993, p. 45]

Among the immigrant youth pool, older immigrants--especially those with minimal prior schooling--present the greatest challenge and the largest proportion of the pool of likely candidates for adult ESL programs. As McDonnell and Hill (1993) observe:

> The instruction given older immigrant students depends profoundly on their academic preparation. *Immigrants who enter elementary school at grade three or above can have serious problems catching up with regular instruction.* Whether this happens in a particular case depends primarily on the student's social class and country of origin... . However, students whose schooling was delayed or disrupted due to poverty and war are often far behind [p. 69-70, emphasis added].

## Common Barriers to Access, Participation, and Transition

There are a number of barriers faced by immigrant and refugee students in accessing adult ESL services (see Klassen & Burnaby, Autumn 1993; Crandall, & Imel, April, 1991, Hayes, 1989, McKay & Weinstein-Shr, Autumn 1993; Miller, 1991; Wiley, 1993). Among the most commonly cited are: (1) the lack of provision for child care to allow parents to attend ESL classes, or the failure to accommodate children who accompany their parents to the educational site; (2) failure to provide for transportation; (3) inability of working adults to attend due to schedule conflicts or due to fatigue resulting from long work days; (4) failure of programs to provide outreach mechanisms for hard-to-reach groups or to provide on-site translation for those who do not speak English; and (5) lack of cultural sensitivity for students unfamiliar with the formal registration procedures--many of which presume that the applicant understands written English, and lack of cultural awareness and sensitivity by classroom teachers.

It is generally recognized that intensive ESL instruction is preferred over models with lesser teacher-student contact. Intensive instruction promotes more rapid language and literacy development. In traditional limited contact instruction, students may spend an entire year (or more) at one level of instruction. If class size is large, they may have had little opportunity to actually use the language. Moreover, they may not have used their skills in any context related to their present lives. Lacking much progress, they are often ineligible for more advanced vocational training programs such as JPTA. When intensive instruction is offered, it is frequently offered at a facility chosen because of it its convenience to the district or community college. Often, students who could benefit from the program cannot attend, especially if they have to work, have children, and if the ESL site is in central location far from their home.

## How Do We Evaluate Program Effectiveness?

The criteria for program success need to include not only access and participation but also the ability of an adult ESL delivery system to enable students to use the English they acquire to achieve personal, economic, and social goals. It must include mechanisms that allow students to "transition" from one program to another (e.g., non-credit to credit program; community-based organization to community college program, etc.) and to move from academic programs to social and economic participation.

Broad policy goals typically see adult ESL instruction as instrumental in promoting socio-cultural integration (or assimilation), economic mobility, and political participation. Programs usually define their content focuses in terms of: (1) survival skills, (2) life skills, (3) academic English skills, or (4) job skills. The connection from the narrower program goals back to the broader policy goals becomes rather amorphous. The missing element at the program level in many delivery systems is a coherent mechanism for transition from here to there. Job skills, for example, are often programmatically conceived of as being related to a particular job at a particular level without consideration of how that job relates to anything else (horizontally or vertically). When the issue of mobility is raised, policy makers, teachers, and students know that English language skills are not the only barrier to success; "better" jobs generally require *both* skills in English *and* educational credentials. Often there is no articulation between academic programs and ESL instruction.

For the student, the promise of mobility through English and literacy skills development is a logical enticement for participation. For the employer, ESL and literacy development for workers means improved communication and efficiency. These somewhat different goals place a heavy burden of expectation on ESL and literacy providers, who typically are preoccupied with maintaining funding and compliance. Most educational programs are required to provide some performance data. For them, "accountability" means how many participants were served, or how much improvement in pre-post test scores can be demonstrated. Other questions related to program effectiveness could be asked; for example: How many "potential" students are in your service area? (This assumes one is clearly defined.) How many students entering your program dropped out and/or did not complete the program? Or, how many students completing your program went on to further academic training or on to a better job, etc. A brief description of one project illustrates both success and dilemmas faced by programs.

During 1990-1991, the California Human Development Corporation's Rural Workplace Literacy Project (RWLP) was successful in devising a model for providing on-site workplace literacy training to migrant and

seasonal farm workers. Since these rural farm workers represent one of the most difficult populations to reach, the on-site approach broke down one of the major barriers to access, i.e., isolation. The program's goals included teaching ESL to help farm workers develop their job skills. The project provided on-site literacy classes for nearly three hundred farm workers at 15 agricultural work-sites (RWLP, 1991).

According to its own report, the project was successful in several respects: Ninety-six percent of the students demonstrated improvement based upon pre- and post test results using the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) instrument. Secondly, the project was able to involve employers who contributed several kinds of support "...including classroom space, administrative services, access to equipment, paid release time, and attendance bonuses" (RWLP, September 1991). These kinds of employer support are exemplary in order to encourage and ensure participation. The project also allowed for flexibility so that its core curriculum could be altered and made site-specific. According to the project's outside evaluation report:

> (1) all participants were very positive toward the program; (2) learning outcomes were positive; (3) most employers did not understand how the literacy program could help them; (4) employers and employees had different objectives for the educational process; (5) most learners participated in workplace literacy in order to move on to a different job; (6) content varied greatly among instructors; and (7) instructors wanted more support. [RWLP, September 1991]

Several of these findings illustrate a dilemma facing policy makers for workplace literacy programs:

1. What does success mean to all involved?
2. How are learner goals and employer goals to be reconciled when they are at odds?
3. Are improved test scores sufficient indicators of program effectiveness?

Improved mobility for the student is commonly touted as one of the major goals of literacy policy. Ironically, while the success of the learner in acquiring literacy skills may promote his or her mobility, it can pose a threat to individual employers in the following ways: The employer may grasp the benefits of workplace literacy in improving communication and efficiency, but how much internal mobility can the enterprise absorb? Some employers may feel they are supporting costly educational programs only to lose their investment when successful learners demand promotions, more pay or move out of the enterprise to seek better

opportunities elsewhere. Employees may feel frustrated when they successfully complete non-credit programs but still lack access to further training that "really counts" (e.g.s., training that bestows diplomas, degrees, and credentials required for mobility). These issues are not easily resolved. They demonstrate that there are more fundamental structural issues that relate to whether programs will be successful in meeting the lofty goal of preparing students for full participation.

## Promising Practices

Ultimately the criteria for determining whether a program has been successful or not must include more than a focus on how many entered and completed the program. There is a need to determine how well the program prepares students to continue their education or improve their job skills. Program evaluation needs to look at the articulation and referral mechanisms so that student progress may be tracked not only within programs, but also between them. One promising model to do just that has been developed in El Paso, Texas. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) funded El Paso Community College (EPCC) to develop a model program that would provide technical assistance to postsecondary programs in integrating services related to the federal JOBs program. (Clymer-Spradling, 1993; Clymer-Spradling, August 1993, Clymer-Spradling, n.d.)

The program targeted "hard-to-serve" students (those with low self-esteem, limited English language proficiency, lack of knowledge of educational and job opportunities, and those in need of child care and transportation). A three step delivery model was developed to serve:

1. Clients with a high school diploma or GED and recent work experience who need quick response vocational and/or job search assistance;
2. Clients with some work experience but in need of remedial education and vocational training;
3. Clients with no employment history and in need of long-term education, English language development and support services.

Central to the program's approach is helping students assess what their needs are and assisting them in developing an educational and training plan that enables them to make informed choices. Then the program tracks students. Among the factors followed are: (1) student demographics; (2) characteristics of their language dominance; (3) an assessment of their basic skills; (4) a profile of their personal educational goals; (5) a record of their attendance in various programs; (6) data on

program completion; (7) program referral data; and (8) information regarding child care services. (Clymer-Spradling, n.d.)

Across the country there are examples of innovative programs that are responding to both individual and group-specific needs. Much of the innovation has come in response to frustration with some of the endemic problems associated with adult ESL. Project REEP in Arlington, Virginia, for example, developed alternate routes of instruction since it was realized that more was needed in addition to general ESL. Three program components were developed in: (1) general ESL/literacy; (2) computer and technology assisted learning; and (3) workplace ESL. (Mansoor, 1993; August, 1993)

The Arlington project seeks to provide intensive instruction fostered by developing partnerships among the local chambers of commerce, businesses (e.g., hotels, property management firms, and health care agencies) and schools. Instruction is located on-site in the workplace or at more accessible sites within the community. Students with lesser English skills commit to an eight level intensive ESL program in which they receive 120 hours (evenings) or 180 hours (during the day) of instruction in 12 weeks at each level. (Mansoor, 1993; August, 1993)

Approximately 700 students are enrolled with another 200, or more, on waiting lists. However, it is estimated that additional students are in need of services because the project serves only students who can pay a small tuition (about one dollar per hour of instruction) and students funded through special grants and contracts. The project estimates that there is probably an equal number of students needing services compared to those who are receiving them. Also, because the needs of potential students vary, *those program factors which make the project accessible for some students present barriers for others*. In other words, "one size does not fit all" (see Wrigley, Autumn 1993).

The small tuition charged and the centralized location of classes are obstacles for some as is the lack of transportation and child care. Recognizing that the needs of some potential students were not being met, the project conducted a needs assessment and found that there was a lower than expected rate of participation for parents of language minority children. The long hours of the intensive program (180 over 12 weeks for the day program and 120 for the evening programs) were more than working parents could handle. To reach them a demonstration family literacy project was initiated with fewer hours and more flexible scheduling at a more accessible site. The project was very successful, but it was terminated because it was only a *demonstration* project (Mansoor, December 1993). Nevertheless, the success of the family literacy project points to the need to identify, and provide support for, successful demonstration projects.

## Linkages between Community-Based Organizations and Publicly Founded Educational Institutions

Community-based organizations are well situated to assess needs and provide outreach to specific ethnic/linguistic groups, but they often lack sufficient resources and technical expertise to undertake a systematic ethnographic assessment of community needs. Community colleges have more resources but are often perceived as impersonal, culturally insensitive, and too academically oriented for individuals and groups less experienced with formal education. In the absence of learner-sensitive models, students tend to be placed in terms of *apriori* levels of ESL content defined by prescriptive grammar and vocabulary competencies. Program levels may also be defined by rather inauthentic test criteria (see Berdan, this volume).

In order to address some of these concerns and to draw upon the strengths of both types of institutions, the Massachusetts Department of Education, through the Massachusetts English Literacy Demonstration (MELD) Project is promoting partnerships between three community-based organizations (CBOs) and three community colleges (CCs). The target populations include Chinese and Haitian Americans in urban settings, and isolated rural populations on Cape Cod. The goals of the project include building on learner strengths rather than on their deficiencies through flexible instructional approaches that meet individual needs in cultural contexts, while exposing the learner to new and unfamiliar demands of academic instruction and of the workplace. MELD is also pursuing ethnographic assessments to determine learner perceptions of barriers to the program. (Atkins, 1993, August 1993).

Despite these efforts and sensitivity to the target population, the program is encountering some difficulties. Quincy, which focuses on ESL for Chinese Americans, has a six-level program that requires students to study six months at each level. The project is now considering expanding the time for each level to one year because, despite progress, many students are unable to make the transition to academic course work at the community college level. ESL in CBOs is frequently focused on "survival skills," whereas the community colleges concentrate on "academic" ESL. (Atkins, August 1993). Clymer-Spradling, (August 1993) reports that the gap between the two is often too great to bridge within a short period of instruction. More is involved here than just the amount of ESL instruction provided. Since many students lacked prior educational opportunities, they need a stronger foundation in literacy (Atkins, August 1993). As it is now well established that children succeed academically when they have a strong foundation in L1 literacy, why should we expect the situation of adults to be different? (cf. Cummins, 1981, 1984a, 1984b, 1985, 1989; cf. Crawford, 1991) Unfortunately, adults are expected to perform in a far

shorter time frame than children, and they are expected to be economically self-sufficient prior to acquiring full proficiency in English.

Vargas (1986) has identified other effective models for the education of Latino adults. Among those that he sees as effective are community-based literacy programs that can be particularly effective in reaching individuals overlooked by federal programs. One such program which Vargas notes was the Barrio Education Project (BEP) in San Antonio, Texas. The program was considered unique because the literacy curriculum was developed from the learner's self-identified needs. Reading was taught through discussion of meaningful topics with personal and social relevance to the students. Following a Freirian approach, the model built on the learner's previous experiences and attempted to increase the learners social and political awareness. Thus, the model saw the process of literacy acquisition literacy as an empowering process.

Vargas also notes that four Family English Literacy Programs (FELPs), funded in 1986 held promise. Since family literacy has been identified as one of the major means of breaking cycles of "illiteracy" or lower levels of literacy, these programs are of major interest. Vargas notes that three of the four projects are using bilingual personnel. Again, topics are chosen based on their interest value and relevance to family needs. Parents also receive instruction in how to help their children succeed in school. Vargas (1986) concludes by identifying major characteristics needed in programs designed to assist Latinos. These are summarized as:

1. Effective literacy programs need to be accessible, i.e., they need to be located in the communities of those in need. Moreover, the environment needs to be non-threatening. Programs must have appropriately trained bilingual personnel.
2. The curriculum must be based upon student needs and interests. English fluency should not be assumed or a prerequisite.
3. The services must be inexpensive since many low-income individuals cannot afford them.
4. Programs must have an effective outreach mechanism. Information cannot be merely distributed in written form, or only in English. Community organizations such as churches, and community events can be used to help promote programs. [pp. 19-21]

## GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

### 1. Create a Coordinated System of Delivery

Because many immigrant, refugee, and indigenous language minority students will either drop out of, or fail to complete school, and because adult basic education (ABE) is typically the only path by which these students can continue to learn English and complete their high school education, there is a need for close articulation among high schools and adult programs. Thus, in ABE programs there is a need for close articulation between the ESL and the GED components.

Each provider, at each level of instruction, tends to focus narrowly on its domain without consideration for, or awareness of, what other providers do or how they relate to them. CBOs tend to concentrate on survival skills. VESL programs tend to focus on job specific English to the exclusion of how language is used within the social context of work. Community colleges concentrate on academic English. Most programs do not tend to effectively recruit. ABE programs serve the largest number of students but have little connection with other programs. Also, there is little connection between their ESL programs and their General Education Diploma (GED) programs. Students with extensive prior schooling in their native languages tend to fend fairly well. However, students with limited prior schooling need more time to develop literacy skills and to accustom themselves to the social expectations of the classroom and literacy practices in academic environments.

### 2. Build on Promising Practices

Projects with demonstrated success need to be expanded and placed in a position to disseminate their findings. Beyond dissemination, successful demonstration projects should provide models for policy reform and funding criteria for new projects.

### 3. Follow Up on Students

Following up on students should be a funded component of projects. Interagency linkage and referral should be required.

### 4. Design Programs to Meet Student and Community Needs

The key to providing access and to promoting participation begins with needs assessment. Although there may be many fine ESL and adult literacy programs, adult basic education under the label of "second language" instruction can easily become a "mixed bag" of oral language and literacy instruction, with little consideration regarding the relationship between the two. ESL programs frequently presume familiarity with classroom practices (Miller, 1991) and the ability to use

print. Students with little prior schooling are often reluctant compete with students who are better educated in the native language. Fearing competition from "those who know," they drop out (Klassen & Burnaby, Autumn, 1993). Thus, the beginning point of adult literacy and second language literacy programs must be the student's needs and goals. Given those needs and goals, and the program's resources and expertise, curriculum should be generated through a *negotiation* between the student and the program (see Auerbach 1992, Wiley, 1988, Wrigley, Autumn 1993).

5. Determine and Adapt to Individual Learner Needs and Goals

Needs assessment and learner profiles are essential in program, curriculum and instructional planning. Needs assessment should concentrate on both the goals and needs of individual learners, and on social and cultural factors that are group-specific. According to Wrigley and Guth (1992), there are many reasons why students enroll. In answer to the question: "Why would an adult want to go (back) to school and learn to read and write in English?" Interviews with learners indicated that students wanted:

- to become more independent; to not have to rely on friends and family to translate; to not be at the mercy of kids who "interpret" school notices and report cards creatively; to be able to go to appointments alone;
- to gain access to "better job;" to help children succeed; to teach children how to make it through the school system;
- to give something back to the community; to help others; to support the school by becoming a teacher or an aide;
- to feel like "somebody" and get some respect; to have others realize that they are dealing with someone who is smart and has ideas; to avoid feeling that all communication breakdown is the fault of the speaker;
- to be involved in education for its own sake; to do something worthwhile for oneself [p. 10]

There is a need for programs to allow for negotiation in the development of curriculum. Adult learners need to be involved in determining what type of program they will to be undertake. In essence, the adult learner has a *right* to make language choices (see Macias, 1979). For example, rather than assuming that the target language of literacy "must" be English, the adult learner should be allowed to exercise choice in the targeted language of literacy. However, as Crandall (1979) has observed students cannot fully negotiate their learning unless

they can make an informed choice. These choices are, however, constrained by several factors: (1) the availability of teachers and materials; (2) the eventual language and literacy functions that will need to be learned and an identification of the contexts in which they will be used; (4) the ease of transferring prior literacy skills from L1 to L2; and (5) the amount of time available for literacy training.

### 6. Improve Access and Participation for Specific Populations

Policy and programs need to target specific groups. Vargas (1986) has offered seven major recommendations that need to be considered in the provision of service to Latinos, who comprise the largest pool of potential adult learners. These recommendations also have relevance for other groups. They are summarized with several minor revisions, below:

1. Greater focus is needed on improving the k-12 educational system, and a special effort is needed to link late immigrant education to adult programs. Greater emphasis is needed on promoting literacy skills, rather than just language skills. Since the intent of the federal Bilingual education act is to do this, a renewed commitment to the program, and increased funding is needed. Moreover, to address the growing problems of drop-outs, educational interventions need to be made at the lower grades.
2. School success involves greater community involvement and parental involvement. Thus, outreach programs to parents are needed.
3. Currently, more public literacy programs such as those under Adult Education Act (AEA), Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), need to be restructured to reach individuals with no, or limited, oral English abilities. Funding to such programs needs to be increased since these programs are currently reaching only a small number of eligible individuals (especially among Chicanos and Latinos).
4. All major programs (whether they are state, local, or private efforts), need to include an ESL component, and when they are based within language minority communities, need to employ bilingual personnel. Special outreach efforts may be needed for those not literate in L1.
5. Adult programs should be designed to accommodate the special needs of working parents and lower income individuals. Thus, provision for child care and transportation may be necessary ingredients of successful programs.
6. Successful program models need to be better identified, documented, and duplicated. Successful programs, such as the

Barrio Education Project, have been allowed to fail or suffer from inadequate funding. Since community-based organizations are located within the areas of greatest need and have direct ties to the community, their role in promoting literacy should be increased.

7. Future literacy initiatives at the national level should more specifically address the needs of language minorities. [Adapted from pp. 21-24]

These recommendations provide a useful starting point. However, it is important to recognize the unique needs of all language minority communities. Prior education, social class, and national origin also need to be considered in formulating even more subgroup-specific recommendations.

### 7. Respond to Group-specific Needs

The fact that programs need to be tailored to accommodate the needs of specific ethnic groups does not preclude the identification of *general principles* that can be applied as funding and evaluation criteria to improve access and participation in programs that have not previously been responsive. There is a growing body of literature that describes approaches that have been successful with specific groups. Cumming (n.d.), in a review of ethnic-specific literature (Auerbach, 1989, 1990, Cumming & Gill, 1991, Delgado-Gaitan, 1987, Wallerstein, 1983, Weinstein, 1984), identifies common elements in successful programs:

*Recruitment* of learners utilizing communication networks among the local minority population, such as word of mouth referrals, TV or radio interviews on local multicultural programs in languages of potential participants, affiliation with community service groups;

*Location of classes* within ethnic neighborhoods and local centers with reputations for community service;

*Instructors* who are themselves members of the minority population, are able to speak the minority language with students when necessary or appropriate, and present successful role models;

*Scheduling* of classes at times which are convenient to participants (e.g. afternoons for women with children at school, shift or evening workers);

*Support structures* such as on-site child care, transportation subsidies, and counseling in participants' mother tongues;

*Curriculum content* and *instructional materials* based on participants' own immediate experience, personal knowledge, perceived problems, and social interests;

*Participatory* approach to program planning and development, rather than preordained, general curricula;

*Direct links with community organizations* and *functions*, such as work situations, labor unions, or religious groups;

*Orientation of community workers*, such as counselors, teachers, or health care workers, who may inadvertently be dissuading people from participating in literacy instruction; and

*Bridging to other programs* such as job training or non-sheltered literacy courses, recycling of successful learners back into programs as mentors, teachers or aides, and liaisoning with community services like health clinics, libraries, and schools. [Cumming, n.d., pp. 5-6]

**8. Require Programs to Be Accountable and Cooperative with other Agencies**

There is a need for an adult ESL delivery system to be designed from the perspective of interagency cooperation and accountability. Adult ESL policies need to focus on the integration of programs into a coherent delivery system that links high schools, CBOs, ABE, programs and community colleges through interagency (and within agency) referral and tracking. Within ABE programs, ESL programs need to be linked to GED programs. Since the majority of ABE students are studying ESL, a more equitable ear-marking of ABE ESL funds may be needed. Non-credit ESL programs in community colleges need to be more explicitly linked to academic and vocational programs. There is also a need to design programs so that they accommodate the unique socio-cultural and linguistic needs of various ethnic groups (and sub-populations within a group, e.g., women and the elderly as well as the needs of individuals within these groups.). For those with little prior schooling who lack native language literacy, bilingual adult programs need to be expanded. Finally, to ensure accountability it is necessary to define a service area, or as the MELD project has done, specially targeted populations.

## CONCLUSION: Institutionalize Effective Approaches

Effective Adult ESL and literacy programs for language minority adults must be based on proven models. In addition, there is a need to systematically disseminate information on effective practices, especially as these relate to specific groups. There is a need for a national Adult ESL clearinghouse modeled along the lines of the National Clearinghouse for Literacy Education. However, beyond sharing information about effective practices, there is also a need to institutionalize proven demonstration models.

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